

*Expansion Is Estimated to Provide 159,000 Uninsured Children in Illinois with Health Care*

(Washington, DC) -

US Rep. Debbie Halvorson today voted for final passage of legislation to provide health care to 11 million children in low-income households. The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) Reauthorization Act was approved by a bipartisan vote of 290-135. President Obama signed the bill early Wednesday evening.

"Expanding health care access for children is something I've been committed to throughout my career as a public servant. As a child, I grew up unable see a doctor because my dad was self-employed and he didn't make enough money to pay for health insurance. For 159,000 children in Illinois, this is very good news," Halvorson said.

"This is the same legislation that was twice vetoed last year. If Americans want to know how the new Congress and President are changing the way Washington does business, look no further than our commitment to keeping kids healthy."

This bipartisan bill reauthorizes the State Children's Health Insurance Program through FY 2013 and preserves coverage for all 7.1 million children currently covered by SCHIP, including 345,576 children in Illinois. SCHIP was created in 1997 to provide health care coverage for children in families that earn too little to afford health insurance for their children or themselves, but too much to qualify for Medicaid.

The bill also extends health care coverage to 4.1 million additional low-income children, who are currently uninsured.

The bill is fully paid for - raising the tobacco tax by 62 cents. Raising the tobacco tax also promotes children's health by discouraging children from smoking. According to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, a 62-cent increase in the tobacco tax means that nearly 1.9 million fewer children will take up smoking.

Halvorson commented, "No child should ever be unable to see a doctor simply because his or her family cannot afford it. This bill will make sure more kids have access to doctors. I'm proud to have voted to expand access to health care for children, and I'm very pleased the President signed this bill soon after passage."